



Iowa Department of Human Services

Terry E. Branstad
Governor

Kim Reynolds
Lt. Governor

Charles M. Palmer
Director

December 16, 2016

Michael Marshall
Secretary of Senate
State Capitol Building
LOCAL

Carmine Boal
Chief Clerk of the House
State Capitol Building
LOCAL

Dear Ms. Boal and Mr. Marshall:

Enclosed please find a copy of the Mercy Autism Center –Autism Spectrum Disorder Report, addressed to the General Assembly, as required by 2016 Iowa Acts, Chapter 1139.11.

Please feel free to contact me if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

Sally Titus
Deputy Director,
Department of Human Services

ST/tm

Enclosure

cc: Terry E. Branstad, Governor

Iowa Department of Human Services



Mercy Autism Center Pilot Project Report

December 16, 2016

Mercy Autism Center Pilot Project Report

Executive Summary

This is the Mercy Autism Center pilot project report to the General Assembly pursuant to 2016 Iowa Acts, Chapter 1139, Section 11. This report is an overview of SFY16 activities completed by the Mercy Autism Center located at Mercy Medical Center-Dubuque, and community partners. The report also provides an overview of the activities undertaken during the life of the program. Mercy Medical Center declined to accept the SFY17 allocation due to program and staff changes. The program no longer directly provides autism services and does not have staff capacity to continue the pilot program.

Introduction

The Mercy Medical Center-Dubuque, Mercy Autism Center Pilot Project began operation in 2012, pursuant to 2012 Iowa Acts, Chapter 1133, Section 128, paragraph 23A. The legislation stated the following:

“Of the funds appropriated in this section, \$25,000 shall be used for the public purpose of providing a grant to a hospital-based provider headquartered in a county with a population between 90,000 and 95,000 in the latest certified federal census that provides multiple services including but not limited to diagnostic, therapeutic, and behavioral services to individuals with autism spectrum disorder across the lifespan. The grant recipient shall utilize the funds to implement a pilot project to determine the necessary support services for children with autism spectrum disorder and their families to be included in the children’s disabilities services system. The grant recipient shall submit findings and recommendations based upon the results of the pilot project to the individuals specified in this division of this Act for submission of reports by December 31, 2012.”

The project received allocations of \$25,000 annually with similar authorizing legislation in SFYs 14, 15, 16, and 17. Mercy Medical Center has submitted annual reports every year of operation as required by the legislation. The reports describe the activities completed by the project to develop a coordinated system of service for children with a diagnosis of, or at risk of, a diagnosis of autism. Mercy Medical Center declined to take the allocation for SFY17 and submitted a final report to the Department of Human Services (Department) in July 2016 that summarized tasks completed for the preceding year and identified reasons for conclusion of the pilot project.

Project Activities 2012-2016

Mercy Medical Center in Dubuque convened a work group comprised of local stakeholders, providers, family members, and legislators to guide the development of the pilot project. The purpose was to develop a collaborative community-based system

of care to serve children with a diagnosis of autism and their families. The project also closely collaborated with the University of Iowa Child Health Specialty Clinics Regional Autism Program.

One of the services recommended by the experts involved was Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) provided and supervised by Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA). Grant funding helped provide funding for ABA services through the Mercy Autism Center for children not otherwise able to access these services due to lack of insurance coverage. Necessity for this funding ended after the implementation of the state-funded Autism Support Program in 2013. The project also worked to integrate autism services into educational settings through close collaboration with local and area education agencies and grant-funded training of educational staff. Training of families to work with their children was also funded through the grant.

Early identification and intervention for children with a diagnosis of autism was a key activity supported by the pilot project. This was implemented through training of primary care providers, family members, child care providers, and other stakeholders who work with young children in Dubuque and surrounding counties on early signs and symptoms of autism and referral processes for evaluation and treatment services. The grant also paid for evaluation services through the Mercy Autism Center.

Training of Mercy Medical Center staff and other community providers on methods to work with children with autism was also funded. This was identified as a need to improve the health care experience for children with a diagnosis of autism and their families. This training included provision of tool boxes to help providers engage more effectively with children with a diagnosis of autism. Specific training was provided to Mercy Medical Center staff to develop an “autism friendly” hospital.

Funding was also used for provision of crisis prevention services for children with a diagnosis of autism to help families and their providers develop interventions to reduce crises due to challenging behavior.

In 2016, Mercy stated its intention to transfer autism evaluation services to Hills and Dales which also provides ABA services in Dubuque. The Child Health Specialty Clinic Autism Navigator coordinates the local autism committee to encourage collaboration among the multiple service providers. Mercy states its intention to remain involved with autism services in the Dubuque area through the provision of speech and occupational therapy services as well as emergency and pediatric services but will not provide autism evaluation or ABA services going forward, therefore chose not to accept further pilot project funding effective in SFY17.

Conclusion/Recommendations:

The director of the Mercy Autism Center, Bobbi Schell, stated in the final report submitted to the Department that Mercy Medical Center is thankful for the support shown by the Governor, Iowa Legislature and Department in financially supporting the

pilot project. The Mercy Autism Center strongly believes that another community can replicate what has been achieved in the Dubuque area if they bring all of their resources together in the best interest of the people served.